

BBC

# DOCTOR WHO

TIME

TRIPS

A.L.

# Kennedy

The Death Pit



# Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Title Page

Doctor Who: The Death Pit

Copyright

# About the Book

Something odd is going on at the Fetch Brothers Golf Spa Hotel. Receptionist Bryony Mailer has noticed a definite tendency towards disappearance amongst the guests. She's tried talking to the manager, she's even tried talking to the owner who lives in one of the best cottages in the grounds, but to no avail. And then a tall, loping remarkably energetic guest (wearing a fetching scarf and floppy hat) appears. The **Fourth Doctor** thinks he's in Chicago. He knows he's in 1978. And he also knows that if he doesn't do something very clever very soon, matters will get very,

very out of hand.

# About the Author

A. L. Kennedy has twice been selected as one of *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists and has won a host of other awards – including the Costa Book of the Year for her novel *Day*. She lives in London.

BBC

# DOCTOR WHO

## THE DEATH PIT

*A.L. Kennedy*



BOOKS

PAUL HARRIS WAS dying. This wasn't something his afternoon's schedule was meant to include. Death, as far as Paul was concerned, was one of the many unpleasant things which only happened to other people. He'd never even attended a funeral – *all those miserable relatives*. He'd also avoided weddings – *all those smug relatives*. And he'd skipped every christening to which underlings in his firm had thought they should invite him – *all those sticky, noisy babies... all those sticky, noisy underlings...*

Mr Harris's death was particularly surprising to him as it involved being

eaten alive by a golf bunker. At least, he could only assume that something *under* the bunker was actually what was eating him alive – now he'd sunk down past his knees into the thing – and he could only assume that it wasn't going to stop eating him because... it wasn't stopping.

First he'd been gripped around his ankles while he eyed a tricky shot for the 13th green. The process had involved an initial pressure, combined with a slight, but very disturbing, pain and then a type of numbness had set in. Next, he'd sunk into the sand by a few inches, before another – he tried not to think of the word *bite*, but couldn't help it – before another *bite* was taken with a little more gentle pain and then more numbness and



another tug downwards. Paul liked to think of himself as powerful and unstoppable and there was huge power and a definitely unstoppable will at work here and he would certainly have admired them both had they not been ruining his very nice pair of lime green golfing trousers and his very nice legs inside them.

Paul was surprised to discover that he was completely unable to scream for assistance and there was no one about to even notice his rather unusual situation, never mind save him from it. His golfing partner, David Agnew, had unfortunately flounced off towards the clubhouse a short while ago. As Paul was jerked further into the sand, he reflected that

Agnew had proved himself as bad a loser as he was a really irritating man. Still, it would have been helpful if Agnew had stuck around because then maybe he could have pulled Paul out of the bunker, or written down a few last requests, or got eaten too. Paul imagined that seeing David Agnew get eaten by a golf bunker would have been highly satisfying, because people like David Agnew were pretty much ideal golf bunker food, in Paul's opinion, although he was prepared to admit that he knew nothing about bunkers which ate people and what they might prefer. If he'd had any information on them, perhaps provided by his loyal secretary Glenda, then he might not be plunged to his waist

in one right now.

The list of things that Mr Harris knew nothing about was extensive. He had never been at all curious about those aspects of the world which didn't benefit him directly.

Nevertheless, the most inquisitive human alive on Earth at that time still wouldn't have known Paul was being consumed by a creature so old and so mythical the universe had almost completely forgotten it ever was. The thing had passed beyond legend and was now simply a vague anxiety at the edge of reality's nightmares.

In a way, it was quite wonderful that such a being should still exist. Although, of course, it wasn't wonderful for Paul

Harris, whose abilities to communicate – by signalling, crying out, or extending a subtle and sophisticated telepathic field, should he have been able to do so – had all been suppressed by his attacker. His attacker didn't like to be interrupted when it was feeding and fortunately evolution had allowed it to develop an ability to prevent its meals from attracting any kinds of aid. Unless, that was, the beast wanted dessert to arrive in one big arm-waving, or feeler-waving, or tentacle-waving, or slave excrescence-waving, or tendril-waving crowd of would-be rescuers, all panicky and delicious. In which case screaming, pleading and pretty much anything else along those lines was permitted.

Evolution also meant that although Paul was being injured horribly he was feeling only mild distress. Eating a struggling meal was potentially dangerous and tiring, so the creature had developed many complex and fascinating mechanisms which meant that each bite it took of its prey released soothing analgesics and sedatives into – taking this afternoon as an example – Paul's ravaged circulatory and nervous systems.

By this point Paul's arms were flopping gently on the bunker's surface and his torso was locked into the sand as far as his armpits. He wasn't a stupid man and he was fairly sure that as much of his body as he could still peer down

at and see was about as much as was still available for board meetings and games of squash or, for that matter, golf. (Although he was definitely beginning to go off golf.) It seemed strange to him that he couldn't seem to be too upset about any of this. He was, in fact, increasingly docile and happy in a way that reminded him of once being a quite pleasant child with many exciting and generous prospects ahead, every one of which he had ignored or wasted later.

As Paul's head was tugged down beneath the surface of the bunker, he could still feel the gentle summer breeze tickling at the palms of his hands which were raised and therefore still vaguely free. He experienced a brief regret that

he hadn't kept up his piano lessons and that he'd gone on holiday to the Turks and Caicos Islands instead of attending his own grandmother's funeral. Paul then thought, 'Is that breathing? I seem to be able to hear breathing... A bit like a cow's, or a horse's breathing... some very big animal. I wonder what it is.'

At which point Mr Harris stopped wondering anything.

Anyone who had passed by the bunker at that exact moment would have seen two well-manicured hands apparently being sucked into the bunker and disappearing. They could then have watched the sand tremble and shiver until it presented a perfectly smooth and harmless surface again.

Bryony Mailer was quite possibly the most inquisitive human alive on Earth at that time, which was 11.26 a.m. on 4 June 1978. She was a slim but wiry 24-year-old female human with a great sense of humour, huge reserves of ingenuity and a degree in European History. None of these things was helping her enjoy what she had once hoped was a temporary position as Junior Day Receptionist at the Fetch Brothers Golf Spa Hotel. There wasn't a Senior Day Receptionist, because that would have involved Mr Mangold, the hotel's manager, in paying Senior kind of rates. So Bryony was Junior and



would stay that way for as long as she was here, stuck in perhaps the most tedious place on Earth. Lately, a couple of guests had even checked in and then simply given up on the place, leaving their luggage and running away. Their accommodation had been paid for in advance – it wasn't as if they were trying to dodge their bills – and she could only assume the sheer boredom of the Fetch had driven them out. And the wallpaper in the bedrooms was quite offensive – she didn't think she'd want to sleep inside it, either.

When Bryony wasn't folding away other peoples' abandoned pyjamas and storing their unwanted spongebags (in case they came back for them), she was

dealing with the health and beauty requirements of golfers' bored wives, coordinating the coaching and playing and post-game massage and bar lunch requirements of the golfers and generally fielding every bizarre request and complaint that an old hotel full of petulant people can generate on any given day. She didn't get a lot of down time.

But she'd been having a quiet spell lately. For as long as six minutes, she'd been able to ponder whether she'd have her tea with or without a biscuit and whether the biscuit would be a Mint Yo Yo or an Abbey Crunch. It wasn't so long ago that she'd been able to tease apart all the convolutions of French

foreign policy under Cardinal Richelieu, but now even a choice between two biscuits was likely to give her a headache. And Mangold would probably have eaten them in the meantime, even though they were her biscuits...

She decided to take the risk of leaving the slightly scuffed reception desk unattended and propped a small handwritten card next to the brass counter bell – PLEASE PRESS FOR ASSISTANCE – before she slipped off through the door next to the scruffy room-key pigeonholes and along the narrow passageway that led to the Staff Office.

Bryony had never liked this passageway. It was too narrow and its

wallpaper was dreadful – worse than in the bedrooms – a claustrophobic pattern of purple and red swirls which almost seemed to wriggle when you looked at them. And it was always either overly cold in here or – like today – much hotter than was pleasant. She tended to rush the journey.

As she rushed – it wasn't far and would take less than a minute – she wasn't aware that behind her the wallpaper not only wriggled, but swelled in two places, heaving and stretching until it seemed there were two figures caught behind it and fighting to get out. Had she turned and seen this happening it would have made her very frightened and also slightly nauseous, but

she kept on walking, hurrying, simply aware of an odd taste in her mouth, as if she'd been sucking pennies.

When Bryony reached the office doorway she saw that both her packets of biscuits had disappeared and there was a little gathering of crumbs on the shelf where she'd left them.

She didn't see – because her back was turned and anyway why on earth should anyone be on the alert for such a thing? – that two figures had detached themselves stickily from the nasty wallpaper and were now padding along towards her. Each of them seemed unfinished, like rough models of small human beings made out of purple and red meat. Their outlines shifted and rippled

horribly. Eyes and teeth emerged to the front of the two rudimentary heads; they showed white and shining and clever against the shifting masses of glistening flesh.

And there was no way out for Bryony. The Staff Office was a dead end in every sense, as she'd often told herself.

'Oh, bum.' Bryony sighed. This was going to be another awful day. And she had the very distinct feeling she was being watched. There was a tingling against her neck. She was filled with an impulse to turn round and also an idea that if she did she might not like what she discovered.

As they walked – now very close to Bryony – the figures kept altering, their

outlines firming, features coming into focus and solidifying. Then four arms stretched out towards her and, as they lifted, were sheathed in fresh skin. Four hands became completely hand-like, with four thumbs and sixteen fingers and twenty fingernails, just as they reached to clutch her.

As Bryony finally did begin to spin round she felt herself being held by both her wrists and heard the word, ‘Boo!’ being shouted by two very similar voices.

‘Oh, for goodness’ sake.’ It was the Fetch twins, Honor and Xavier, looking up at her and giggling while they squeezed her wrists. ‘You two nearly scared the life out of me.’

‘That would be bad. Your life should be in you,’ said Xavier, the boy twin. The Fetch twins weren’t absolutely identical, as they liked to tell everyone. They were a boy and a girl, very alike, but not the same. ‘We’re very sorry.’ Xavier didn’t currently look sorry at all.

Neither did Honor. ‘We didn’t want to scare you... only sort of worry you a bit. To be exciting.’ She smiled and looked very sweet. ‘Excitement is nice, isn’t it?’

Bryony forgave the little girl, as she always did. She always forgave both twins – they were just extremely... forgivable. Even though they did seem to turn up suddenly more often than not, as if they were creeping about and planning



something only they understood. And it wasn't as if Bryony didn't need some excitement. She longed for it, in fact.

Xavier squeezed her hand between his, tugging. 'Grandmother says she would like you to come and visit her for tea.'

This was sort of good news – the twins' grandmother was Julia Fetch, the reclusive widow who owned the hotel. If she had decided to like Bryony that might make life much easier for the Permanently Junior Day Receptionist and maybe even mean Mangold didn't eat Bryony's biscuits. Then again, she really didn't want to work here for much longer. Possibly it would mean she got a good reference when she resigned,

though...

The twins peered up at her, identically expectant and cute with their willowy limbs, perfect complexions and sun-bleached hair: Xavier in a blue and white striped T-shirt and blue shorts, Honor in a red and white striped T-shirt and red shorts. They were both barefoot, as usual. Bryony thought maybe she might mention to Mrs Fetch that running around with no shoes on wasn't terribly hygienic. Then again, maybe Mrs Fetch ran around in bare feet, too. No one ever saw her and she was incredibly wealthy – she could do whatever she liked. She could just not wear anything at all, ever, if she felt like it, or dress as a pirate. Of the two choices, Bryony was strongly in

favour of the pirate option.

Honor squeezed Bryony's hand this time. 'Do say yes. We'd be ever so pleased and have cucumber sandwiches.' Both twins spoke like children out of an old-fashioned story book. 'Truly we would.' And maybe incredibly wealthy people talked like that all the time – Bryony had no idea, being what she might have called *incredibly not wealthy* if it wouldn't have depressed her to do so.

Bryony nodded at the twins – while thinking  
*pleasepiratecostumepleasepiratecostum*  
– and both kids gave a cheer.

'Thank your grandmother very much. When I have a break I will come over.'

‘This afternoon! This afternoon!’ The twins skipped and chanted as they scampered away up the passage and out of sight.

‘Weird little people.’ Bryony shook her head and, in the absence of biscuits, pottered back out to the reception desk. There was no sign of the twins and the grandfather clock was, as usual, not ticking. As far as Bryony was concerned, life was dusty and hot and dull, dull, dull.



Out on the golf course, now shimmering with heat under the June sun, a peculiar person struggled with his golf bag, which seemed to be much larger than

was necessary. It was almost taller than him. But then, he was on the small side. Once again, his putter fell to the grass and once again a fellow golfer spotted him flailing about just where he shouldn't be and yelled, 'Get out of the bloody way, man! Fore, for heaven's sake! Fore!'

As he picked up his putter, only to watch several woods clatter onto the carefully manicured turf in a heap, the figure sighed and wondered, 'Four of what? I don't think I even have one of them... I don't think...' He was out of his depth, as he usually was, and felt distinctly hot and uncomfortable in his black woollen unsuitable suit. He peered in the direction of the Fetch Hotel and

the Fetch Hotel front entrance and the Fetch Hotel reception desk and the area near to the reception desk and the precise spot – which he could only guess at longingly – where Bryony Mailer was standing at that very moment.

He sighed again, this time from the soles of his feet, right up to the ends of each hair on his head. It was horrible being in love. It was considerably more horrible being in love with someone too beautiful for you to even look at properly – unless you knew they were looking somewhere else and you wouldn't have to meet their eyes and blush and then want to burst into flames or evaporate or something. It was more horrible still when you understood

completely that the person you loved clearly found you far less interesting than watching a pebble. It was most horrible when your love could never be, not in any way, not ever.

He sighed again until he felt completely hollowed out and didn't even flinch when a golf ball sliced past him, close enough for him to hear the way its tiny dimples disturbed the air.

'Fore, you *moron!* *Fore!*' An irate voice screamed away to his left.

He really would have to work out this four thing. He bent to gather up his clubs with a heavy and tragically romantic heart.



As a golf ball landed much further away from the 12th green than its owner had intended, Bryony thumbed through her stack of pending reservation slips while deciding – yet again – that she hated golf, hated golfers, hated golfers' wives (did they have no lives of their own?) and that she really hated her ex-boyfriend Mick (a non-golfer) for having sapped her confidence, just when she'd been making postgraduate career decisions. A year ago, she'd thought working here would be relaxing and give her a taste of real life, and maybe she could write a book about... something... something to do with history... in her evenings off before becoming a stunningly attractive and



popular young professor somewhere. Now she knew she was bored out of her mind, was never going to write anything if she didn't get away from the horrible Fetch premises and horrible Fetch guests and the horrible Mr Mangold. Bryony was equally certain that she had no idea what came next. Her lack of clarity about what came next was scary and why she hadn't left yet.

‘Oh, I wouldn't worry terribly much about that, you know,’ said a friendly, velvety kind of voice.

Bryony glanced up to see a very tall man studying her from the doorway. He grinned with rather more teeth than one person should have. He appeared to have been dressed by a committee,

possibly a drunk committee: wing collar and something that might once have been a cravat, baggy checked trousers, brown checked waistcoat, long purple velvet frock coat with bulging pockets, raddled shoes... an immense and disreputable scarf with a life of its own...

‘These things quite often work themselves out in highly unpredictable ways. Luck has a lot to do with it. Although one can make one’s own luck, I always think. At least I think I think that. Or else someone told me that. Probably someone lucky.’ He made his way across the foyer towards her, half loping and half tiptoeing with a general air of being highly delighted to see everything around him including the dust on the

broken grandfather clock. Bryony thought she'd never encountered anyone so remarkable in her life.

She was right.

As the man toped, or liptoed, up to Bryony's desk he continued amiably: 'Quite possibly you'll discover you're a creature of infinite resource. It's very warm for January, isn't it? Or then again I may have missed January and I'm definitely not in Chicago. Am I?'

Bryony heard herself say, 'Arbroath.'

'Well, that's quite close. I degaussed the Mackenzie Trench circuit before I set off. Which sometimes works. But mostly not.' And he smiled again, even more largely. 'Hello, I'm the Doctor.' He seemed somehow like her oldest friend,

like a wonderful relative she'd heard a lot about but never met.

Bryony, while wondering how any human being could have that much hair – this kind of dense, lolloping head of wildly curly hair – fumbled through all the possible replies she could make to this Doctor person. Among them were, 'Who on earth are you really, though?' and 'How did you know what I was thinking?' and '*What?*' and 'Do you ever wash that scarf? Or can't you because it would object? Would it be like trying to wash a cat...?'

While she *urled* and *ahed*, the Doctor nodded patiently, even slightly annoyingly, as if he were coaxing a dim child through a really easy sum. On the

one hand he was clearly the type of person who should make anyone sensible very nervous, but on the other he filled her with the deepest sense of trust she'd ever experienced. Which took her right back to supposing she ought to be nervous.

Eventually, she managed, 'Do you have a reservation?' Which was a completely boring thing to say and made him look gently disappointed.

'A reservation? Well, no, I don't believe I do. When I travel I generally bring my own accommodation.' The Doctor's very large and very curious eyes lifted to ponder the ceiling while his monologue ambled along both gently and unpreventably. 'I might be due for a

holiday, of course. I always forget to take them. Usually someone reminds me, but there's no one to do that for me at the moment.'

Bryony wondered if he was just some weirdo who was camped in the scrub by the lake – they'd had that kind of problem before. He smelled a bit peculiar – but it was a clean kind of smell, more like the way the air smelled right before a thunderstorm with a trace of added icing sugar than someone who woke up in a tent.

He continued, while apparently trying not to grin. 'I was lost in a virtual jungle for a while quite recently. Have you ever been lost in a virtual jungle? Takes it out of you. Perhaps I should have a

holiday?’ He eyed her name tag. ‘Bryony Mailer, do you think I need a holiday, should I stay here?’ Then he looked straight at her the way an extremely bright boy might if he were expecting ice cream.

And Bryony Mailer thought – *This is it. This is what’s next.*

Then she told the Doctor. ‘Yes. I think you should stay. You should stay here.’

\*

At the most secluded edge of the Fetch Estate in a small, but dazzlingly well-equipped cottage, Miss Julia Fetch – she had never got around to marrying – rearranged her extensive collection of glass octopuses. (Or octopodes.) She

had them made in Venice by an increasingly elderly team of master glass blowers, lamp workers and glass artists. She softly ran her – she had to admit – increasingly elderly fingers across the rounded head of an *Octopus rubescens* and gently waved at the perfectly modelled tentacles of a red-spot night octopus, or *Octopus dierythraeus*. She smiled.

As the years had passed, she'd found that she had become slightly forgetful, perhaps even very forgetful, but she had perfect recall when it came to the names of octopus species. She had always been fond of octopodes (or octopuses) and she was using a tiny fraction of her monumental cash reserves to have every



variety of octopus modelled in glass. There were over a hundred to reproduce and each exquisitely delicate sculpture took nearly a year of the craftsmen's work. It was very possible that she wouldn't quite manage to see the collection completed. She was also sole patron and very generous supporter of the Julia Fetch Foundation for the Care and Support of Octopuses (or Octopodes). These were really her only two remaining indulgences, apart from the cottage's fantastic kitchen – which she hardly used – and the marble-lined bathroom and generously proportioned bath in which she soaked her sometimes rather achy limbs, while wishing that she had more legs. Or more arms. Or both.

When she was younger Miss Fetch had enjoyed the usual toys and treats of the ultra-rich: buying sports cars and villas on sun-kissed coastlines, owning a London townhouse and a moderately sized castle (with village attached) quite near Folkestone, running stables full of racehorses, and country estates, all of which were seething with fat, juicy, slow-moving game birds and succulent deer. But she didn't really enjoy driving and paying other people to drive her Bugattis and Duesenbergs and Alfa Romeos had seemed silly. Filling her villas (and the townhouse and the castle) with loud strangers hadn't been nearly as much fun as she'd expected and filling them with friends was very difficult

because having friends when you're vastly rich just gets quite *complicated*. Rattling around next to her swimmerless swimming pools, or wandering alone across her dusty ballrooms had been depressing. She'd caught herself talking to the geckos in one place and half expecting them to answer. Her racehorses were beautiful, but had never seemed that fond of her – they tended to be slightly highly strung. And she had never been able to bring herself to kill anything on her estates. In fact, she'd been vegetarian for at least twenty years, if not forty, or sixty... Eventually, she'd given away all her homes apart from the cottage. They'd been turned into community centres and octopus research

facilities. She'd sold her sports cars and horses and let her estates go back to nature and be overrun by un-shot-at animals and, by now, some quite rare plants, which nobody shot at either.

Or that was the past which she currently remembered. She sometimes had the feeling that she had previously remembered other pasts, but she couldn't be sure. Being this old was slightly confusing. Then again – as the twins often told her – it was very reasonable to be confused when she knew so much and had been to so many places and done so many things, occasionally in diving gear. (But never dressed as a pirate.)

And as long as she had the twins – her

beautiful, kind and charming Honor, her handsome, kind and charming Xavier – she knew that everything would be all right. That was something she didn't forget.

She never left her cottage these days. She didn't need to. A dedicated geostationary satellite poured a constant flow of information into her personal media hub – located in what used to be the pantry – and she could spend all day, if she wanted, learning more about octopus camouflage techniques, or the cunning ways in which they could impersonate other sea creatures, or reading her Foundation's latest test results on octopus intelligence. From the hub, she could also keep an eye on the

stock market and watch her money quietly making more money.

But she did feel the need for a little company now and then. She did think – perhaps regularly, perhaps only once a month, she wasn't entirely certain – that it would be nice to invite some pleasant people to take tea with her. Nothing grand, or fussy – just tea with small sandwiches and perhaps slices of fruit cake and maybe scones.

She did sometimes tell the twins about arranging to have tea and they did promise to go and find her suitable guests, but she couldn't – if she was honest – absolutely recall how often this happened, or if she had ever served anybody tea, or discussed the mating

rituals of squid while buttering very thin toast and handing out napkins.

Occasionally she dreamed that the inside of her mind was somehow becoming occupied by a being much cleverer than she was, something with dark tendrils, or tentacles reaching into her personality and softly wriggling about across her memories in a way that made them jumble and fade.

Still, it didn't matter. She was entirely happy and probably had forgotten her last tea party in the usual old lady type of way. Probably, if she concentrated, she could say how many cucumber sandwiches this or that visitor had eaten and whether there had been enough jam. And there was no reason to worry if she

couldn't. As she stared out through her window at the well-groomed trees and glossy shrubs bordering her golf course, she nodded to herself and smiled again. She had a good life. And sixty-eight perfectly lovely Venetian glass octopodes. Or octopuses.

\*

David Agnew was a man who purposely ate octopus whenever he could. He was currently sitting in the Fetch Hotel's Sweet Spot Bar and wishing he was, instead, lolling by the pool at his Greek island villa, tucking into some fresh octopus legs and shooting geckos with his air pistol. These were the kind of things he enjoyed.



He was not enjoying his vodka and orange, which was warmish and rather unpleasant and definitely hadn't involved fresh orange juice, even though he'd asked for it specifically. Some chance of proper service in a dump like this. Still, Fetch Brothers had a fabulous golf course and he could usually get round it in 86. Or 90. Definitely in 98.

Agnew considered complaining, but he couldn't be bothered because at present he felt extremely good about life. He'd showered after he left the course, changed into his new, rather dashing, safari suit and he wasn't due back at the office for another two hours. That gave him more than enough time for a spot of lunch. He snapped his fingers to summon

the barman and ordered a prawn cocktail and a basket of scampi and chips. And a glass of Liebfraumilch.

While he waited for his bar meal, he glanced round at the golfing prints, the photos of men in large caps and plus fours, the little shelf of donated trophies and the Challenge Cup. This year, he had a real chance of winning the Cup. There had been ten players who were better than him on paper, but seven of them weren't competing this time round.

Actually – he corrected himself – *eight* of them wouldn't be competing. Yes, he was sure of that. He was absolutely sure that Paul Harris wouldn't be trying for the Challenge Cup this year. Or any other year.

David Agnew tugged at his beige jacket to smooth it and grinned. The world was a very satisfactory place.

Then it became significantly less satisfactory as a grassy, shabby, scrawny, sweaty man clattered into the bar with a golf bag he seemed quite unable to control. Knocking over a number of stools as he proceeded, he then sank to a halt at the table next to Agnew's and flopped the bag messily down beside him. Its ancient clubs emerged like a rusty threat and disfigured the carpet.

Agnew gave the newcomer his best withering stare and pointed to a large sign which read GOLF BAGS AND GOLF ATTIRE ARE NOT

## PERMITTED BEYOND THE CLUBHOUSE.

At this, the dreadful interloper flinched and said, ‘Oh. Oh, dear... I... but I’m... well, I thought that as I was... I’m a resident... guest... that is... oh, dear... I am very...’ He fumbled at the bag’s shoulder strap, which had come adrift, and stood up rapidly in a way that produced a shower of tees, grass tufts and dried mud. Then he reached into his bag and pulled out – Agnew couldn’t begin to guess why – its last remaining club, a battered putter, and waved it around as if he was conducting some type of interior orchestra.

‘Careful! You nearly had my head off with that. What’s wrong with you?’

The putter crashed down across Agnew's table while the ghastly little man mumbled, 'Wrong...? No, it's just me... me, you see... people always seem to find that me being me is wrong... I don't mean it to be...'

Agnew bellowed, 'Sit down!'

At this, the stranger squeaked, 'OK.'

Agnew announced, 'I have a headache and would like to finish my lunch in peace.' Which was a confusing thing to say as his lunch hadn't arrived yet, but he was too annoyed to make sense.

Agnew frowned while the man peered at him.

'Well, I... Sorry for speaking... but I won't interrupt. That is... I'm Mr Ian Patterson.' The grubby man recited his

name as if it was something he'd had to memorise recently. 'And I... being here without golfing was... it would have seemed... but I don't play golf... and...'

He shoved the fallen clubs back into his bag distractedly. 'They loaned me these... things... and I already had the... the putter thingy...' Then he started to thump at his clothing in a doomed effort to remove the layer of muddy dust under which he was now operating. This simply spread the dust further.

'Mr Patterson!'

'Ah!' Patterson ducked warily for an instant and stopped thumping. 'Yes?'

'Why don't I give you a golf lesson?' Agnew smiled like a crocodile approaching a fat gnu he'd caught out

paddling by itself. ‘Would you like that? Eighteen holes? Ideal, I’d say... I’m David Agnew. Allow me to be...’ He clearly found it difficult to say the next word. ‘... Helpful.’

Before Patterson could even think about how unlikely this was, he found himself suddenly having his golf bag thrust into his confused arms and being propelled out of the bar while Agnew shouted to the barman, ‘No lunch for me. Busy. Cancel it all. Back in fifteen minutes.’

This puzzled Patterson because even he knew fifteen minutes wouldn’t give them enough time for a full round of golf, not that Patterson wanted a full round or really anything more to do with golf. It

seemed a ridiculous game and – *oh, dear* – he was being badgered along towards the front entrance and – *oh, no* – here was Bryony, lovely Bryony, talking to a bizarre-looking guest and apparently getting on extremely well with him – *it was the curly hair, women loved curly hair* – Patterson's hair was as flat and lifeless as his hopes – and it was ginger – and...

‘Good afternoon, Mr Agnew.’ Bryony had lifted her head. Her extremely attractive head. And because of the whole attractiveness thing it was horribly impossible not to look at her, while she then said, ‘Good afternoon, Mr Patterson.’ And the whole looking at her thing meant that Patterson was



completely, supernaturally, aware that she was looking at him in return. This caused a kind of searing pain to dart straight into his chest and then bang right out again through his back. It was such a real sensation that he worried about his jacket and whether it had been singed.

‘Oh, I’m... sorry... covered in mud... and grass... and... trying some, er, golf...’ And the last thing he saw of her as he was bundled down the steps and outside was a smile. It was a slightly confused, if not dismayed smile, but it had been for him.

*She’d smiled at him.*

*That was wonderful.*



As the golf-related chaos receded, the Doctor continued talking to Bryony while also thinking a great many things at once. He was aware that the ability to do this was an indication of genius. He was a genius, after all, and what kind of genius would he be if he didn't know that?

Currently, he was wondering why the TARDIS had deposited him here. Even at her most random, the TARDIS always worked within her own kind of personal logic, so his arrival must have some kind of reason behind it. Unless it didn't. Why Arbroath now, as opposed to Chicago in a snowstorm several months ago when the Chicago Area Computer Hobbyists' Exchange was going to

develop its MODEM work and create an inadvertent danger to all life on Earth? Which he'd just have to deal with later. Or rather, earlier... As his friend Robert Louis Stevenson had often told him, there did usually need to be an extremely pressing reason for someone to be in Arbroath, so what was it? And simultaneously the Doctor was finding it odd and worth considering that ever since he'd materialised his mouth had tasted of Maillindian Fever Beans, when he hadn't eaten any in years – dreadful things, just like chewing on old Earth pennies. That needed an explanation. *Metallic taste, metallic taste...* He searched his immense and extremely disorderly memory for dreadful, or

marvellous, or significant events which having a metallic taste in his mouth could indicate were on the way. The words *Telepathic Clamp* fluttered past for his consideration and he dismissed them. No one on Earth would have such a thing for hundreds of years. And there were very few creatures who could generate anything like one – each of them so staggeringly horrible that they would be bound to have already caused the kind of chaos that leaves definite traces: arm-waving, screaming, running about, the telling of wild stories... And meanwhile he looked at Bryony Mailer and thought what a splendid girl she was, really promising for a human being, and wondered why that very untidy

fellow who'd just left hadn't mentioned being in love with her before he was pushed outside, because the chap clearly did adore her. The Doctor reflected, not for the first time, that it was a miracle human beings ever reproduced, given the way they seemed to make the whole process so *difficult*. When they weren't running about being scared and trying to kill each other, they were being *shy*. It was ridiculous.

At which point, what the Doctor could only understand as the most massive **THOUGHT** he had ever encountered battered into his consciousness and overloaded every one of his remarkably agile and adaptable neurons.

As he fell over, his mind had just

enough room to reach out for the single word *fascinating* before everything went blank.

\*

Moments after the Doctor fell, Julia Fetch pottered across her cottage kitchen and set out a stack of doilies and side plates on the table, just in case they might be needed to slip under cakes later at tea. *You never knew when people might drop round.* Then she wondered if she actually had any cakes...

Meanwhile – and much more helpfully – Bryony Mailer rushed round from behind the reception desk just in time to not catch the Doctor as he crumpled up into a multicoloured heap on the foyer

floor. ‘Oh goodness. Doctor? Doctor?’ He looked quite serene, but was completely unconscious. ‘Doctor whoever you are?’ When she took his pulse it seemed very strong, which was good. It also had a kind of built-in echo which surely was much less good.

As Bryony knelt beside the large, horizontal, almost-guest and wondered if she should call an ambulance or just fetch a glass of water, she heard distinctive slithery footsteps approaching. Kevin Mangold, hotel manager and biscuit thief, had arrived to make an awkward situation worse. He always did.

‘Miss Mailer, I hope you haven’t knocked out one of our guests...?’

Mangold snorted wetly and then waited for Bryony to appreciate what he obviously thought had been an impressive joke. She ignored him, so he stared through his dandruff-flecked glasses at the Doctor's highly personalised choice of clothes and then asked dubiously, '*Is he a guest...?*'

Bryony stood up, partly because she was several inches taller than Mangold and knew this annoyed him. 'He was going to be a guest. He was telling me a story about Charles Darwin and then he just turned very pale and collapsed.'

'Well, we can't have that.' Mangold tutted at Bryony as if having people collapse in the foyer was some crazy new scheme of hers to welcome tourists.



‘Not at all. Other guests won’t like it... Perhaps if we dragged him out of the way. He could fit in the Office, or the linen cupboard...’

‘We can’t just put him in a cupboard. He might be ill. We need to call a... another doctor.’

‘Another doctor? Have you already called a doctor?’ Mangold was clearly remembering that the hotel’s official physician, Dr Porteous, was over 70 and more likely to steal towels and bread rolls than be of any help in a medical emergency.

‘No, no, the towels are safe... That is, I mean, *he’s* a doctor.’ Bryony pointed at the Doctor and saw his feet twitch as if he was a big dog dreaming of rabbits.

‘Well, he can’t be a very good doctor – look at him.’

Bryony found she was feeling protective towards the now faintly groaning stranger. ‘I don’t think that really follows.’

The Doctor flopped over onto his back, opened his eyes and declared, ‘I told them the Dymaxion House would never catch on. Far too shiny.’ Before passing out again.

Mangold swayed on his creaking shoes and sucked his teeth. ‘Oh, I don’t like the sound of that.’ Bryony could have sworn a tiny shower of fresh dandruff rose and then fell as Mangold shook his head. ‘You’re Junior Day Receptionist. It’s your responsibility to

prevent outbreaks of this kind, Miss Mailer.'

Bryony was about to make a cutting remark about unfunny idiots and biscuits when the whining sound of the Fetch Resort's one golf cart interrupted her and Xavier ran in, holding a tartan rug and shouting, 'Someone is ill. Isn't it frightful? Someone is ill.'

A number of things then happened simultaneously: the rug was dropped over the Doctor's legs, Mangold sneaked backwards in case he was associated with anything troublesome while any member of the Fetch family was around, Honor ran in and took Bryony's hand and then the Doctor lurched up into a sitting position and

sneezed, surprising everyone – apparently himself most of all.

‘Now where was I?’

He seemed remarkably unsurprised to be on the floor, surrounded by people and partially covered in Royal Stuart tartan. But there was a clear flicker of worry at the back of his eyes. And that made Bryony worry, too. She also asked herself, ‘But how did the twins know that someone was ill?’

\*

Out on the golf course, David Agnew was marching his irritating companion along the path that snaked through the little stretches of woodland and scrub surrounding the fairways and greens. It

was pleasant here and cool because of the shade from the trees and the small and picturesque stream that ran into the course's central lake. Agnew whistled as he marched and was in excellent spirits, but not because of his surroundings. He was, in fact, almost giggling because soon he would reach that especially deep and tricky bunker south of the 13th green and soon he would tell Mr Patterson to step down into it and practise using a sand wedge and soon after that Mr Patterson would be gone, gone, gone. The buffoon probably didn't even have a sand wedge, but Agnew didn't care – every time he left someone he hated in what he privately called Unlucky Bunker 13, they

never came back. And he really, really hated this Patterson chap – the man was untidy, he didn't know how to behave and he was making a joke of everything David Agnew believed should matter. And what David Agnew believed should matter was important. In fact, he'd recently become sure that what he thought was right should be the only thing that *was* right and should therefore govern everything worthwhile. Just lately, it had seemed clearer and clearer that if the world was run along the lines that he, and only he, could imagine for it, then it would be a much better and more orderly place.

It seemed to Mr Agnew that making two people disappear in one day would

be perfectly reasonable and convenient. Then he could have his lunch in peace, or maybe a spa session first to unwind. Why not? Keeping the world as it should be was tiring and he truly couldn't see why he shouldn't have some time to pamper himself now and then.

\*

Also out on the golf course was the Doctor, now striding along in the sunshine next to the golf cart as it trundled joltingly forwards. 'I love machines that trundle, don't you? I think I should get one... or make one... If it would like to trundle...' He smiled down at Bryony, who was riding in the cart with Xavier. 'How are you

feeling?’

‘How am *I* feeling?’ Bryony snapped. She’d been really worried about the Doctor and didn’t appreciate that her worry hadn’t been appreciated. ‘How am *I* feeling?’

The Doctor nodded encouragingly, ‘Yes, that’s what I just said. But you might not remember, you’ve had a nasty shock.’

Bryony was exasperated. She jumped out of the cart, ‘Doctor, you were the one who fainted. I’m perfectly all right.’

Xavier patted her with sympathy. ‘You looked awfully wobbly, though, old girl.’

And Honor, trotting along and holding the Doctor’s hand, chipped in: ‘Yes,



seeing a fainted person must be a dreadful thing.’

Bryony heard herself growl out loud with frustration before beginning, ‘You saw him being a fainted person, too. Why isn’t everyone treating *you* like an invalid? And the Doctor *was* the fainted person. He should be riding on the cart. He should be *lying down*.’

The Doctor tried to calm her, ‘But I *was* lying down. On the floor. That’s what upset you.’ Bryony slapped his arm and he suppressed a grin, because he was indeed teasing her. ‘Oh, quite. Quite.’ Annoying Bryony – and she liked being annoyed, the Doctor could tell – was distracting him slightly from the incredible pain in his head and neck and

the tiny, unaccountable gap he kept running across when he checked his recent memories. Right at the back of today's record so far, there was a numb area. It was disturbing. There were very few things that could interfere with the Doctor's mind, even superficially, and the technologies powerful enough to intrude on him were all both dark and extremely unpleasant. He really wouldn't want to be around if any of them had been unleashed. Except he was around and it seemed highly likely that one of them had been unleashed. Or had unleashed itself... telepathic and psychic energies were so unpredictable and so likely to colonise other available consciousnesses and then magnify... or

even to generate rudimentary sentience in awkward places... Whatever it was, it was a whole lot worse than what now seemed the friendly and welcoming possibilities of a vast telepathic clamp, squeezing the free will out of every brain it afflicted...

Bryony turned to the Doctor and actually stamped her feet, which she hadn't done since she was Honor's age and which immediately made her feel foolish. 'I'm so tired of people talking down to me, just because I'm a woman! And I'm not a Junior Day Receptionist, I'm the Only Day Receptionist! And it's him you should be taking care of!' She waved her arms at the Doctor and then the twins. 'He's scared of something and

trying to hide it and I don't think there are many things that scare him and I really...'

Bryony stopped and immediately regretted all of this so strongly that the Doctor was dimly aware of the precise trains of thought she was moving through. He understood that no one had ever wanted to hear Bryony discussing the role of women in the workplace and so even considering this now made her feel bullied and a bit stupid and as if she was weird and also she would rather be on the golf course with Mr Patterson just now because she thought he was sweet and not sexist and basically unlike almost every other Fetch Hotel golfer she'd met. Not that he really was a

golfer... and...

Bryony, unaware she was thinking *really quite loudly*, was pondering the fact that her last sentence had made the Doctor look genuinely worried for a second or two. She hadn't been mistaken. He really was frightened. And the Doctor being frightened didn't seem like good news.

The Doctor looked at her, completely serious, and said very kindly and softly, 'Oh, I'm incredibly scared most of the time, you know. No one with even a basic knowledge of the universe wouldn't be – it's a completely terrifying place. And enormous. But it's also wonderful and lovely and more interesting than you could possibly

imagine. Even than I could possibly imagine. It never lets me down. And I get to be alive in it all and to be scared and amazed and delighted and... I wouldn't be without it.' Then he adjusted his hat and grinned, playing the fool again. 'I've been without me and before me and after me, but I wouldn't be without the universe.'

Bryony wondered if she was absolutely happy she now knew someone who could casually consider being without the universe.

The Doctor turned to Honor. 'And where are we going?' He'd forgotten their destination again. All his thoughts seemed a bit sticky, or clumped, or hairy, like boiled sweets left in a jacket

pocket.

Honor explained again. ‘To see Grandmother and be in her house and take tea and get better. Grandmother’s teas make everyone better.’

While Julia Fetch carefully put away her side plates and doilies, mildly under the impression that a very fine tea had just been enjoyed by a number of fascinating people, the Doctor nodded and discovered this made his brain feel as if his Lateral Interpositus Nucleus had been prodded with a sonic probe, and the only time that had actually happened he hadn’t enjoyed it one bit. Something in there definitely wasn’t as it should be. It was almost as if a new engram had been forced into his memories – a fake

recollection. And the fake was there to make him believe there hadn't already been another alteration, it had been inserted to make him forget there was a gap. If he couldn't get control of the process, eventually it would all just heal over and then where would he be? A genius with a bit missing who couldn't recall there *was* a bit missing and maybe some added ends and odds which absolutely shouldn't be there – that would never do... Plus, he was starting to feel a little peculiar again. He put his hands in his pockets and whistled a fragment of the 'Song of the Arcanian System Exploration Corps', which was quite pretty and had lots of twiddly bits. Whistling twiddly bits often cheered



him, although not so much today. He felt increasingly as if he wasn't walking on grass, but on green fur, annoyed green fur.

\*

David Agnew was chuckling and peering down at the tricky bunker south of the 13th green. At the bunker's deepest point, the pathetic figure of Ian Patterson hacked an ancient-looking sand wedge into its blinding white surface for something like the 100th time. And for something like the 100th time his golf ball stayed exactly where it was while a great deal of hot sand went all over the place.

‘You’re doing incredibly well,’

Agnew called, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. *Not long now.* ‘I will have to nip off in a minute, but I think you should stay right there and enjoy yourself.’ Agnew was waiting for the unmistakable sensation he got just before It started, this tingling in the soles of his feet and a feeling of immense sort of... Doom.

When the Doom got too bad he just ran. He’d never looked back. He was a man who didn’t like to dwell on details – he preferred to just focus on results.

‘I’m not sure about that, really.’ Patterson swiped the head of his club wildly, producing another sand shower that reached as far as Agnew. ‘I seem to be getting worse. Maybe if I took up

swimming, or snooker...' He swung again and the sand wedge flew out of his hand, landing near Agnew's ankles.

Patterson was hot and miserable and wanted to lie under a tree with some lemonade and the memory of Bryony's smile. 'I'll just climb out...' He firmly believed that if at first you didn't succeed, you should maybe try once more, but then give up completely if you failed again.

'No!' Agnew handed back the club rather forcefully. 'You're really improving.' He smiled like someone who loathed everything he was smiling at and wanted to do it harm. 'Practice makes perfect if you want to be a top golfer.' He then adjusted his expression

until it seemed only furious and painful. He didn't have a face designed for happiness.

Patterson dodged the new incoming smile by studying his sand-filled shoes. 'But I don't want to be a top golfer.'

'Then you should practise until you do.'

Patterson sighed and wondered if he was getting sunstroke, because he was beginning to feel unsteady. Either that or the bunker was beginning to feel unsteady, which wasn't exactly likely. Up above him, he heard Agnew giggle and then say, 'Wonderful. Oh, wonderful!'

'I beg your pardon? I haven't even hit it yet.'

Agnew was suddenly furious. ‘Well, if you’re not going to make an effort, I’m leaving!’ Then he burst out laughing – which was very peculiar for someone who apparently intended to seem angry. ‘Yes! Off I go!’ And then Agnew was suddenly running – quite fast – away from the bunker and back along the path to the Fetch Hotel. ‘It’s a trip to the spa for me. You’ve left me quite exhausted, Mr Patterson.’ Agnew guffawed weirdly. ‘But don’t you worry. The fun is on its way,’ he yelled over his shoulder as he pelted into the cover of the trees. ‘Goodbye, Mr Patterson. Absolutely goodbye.’

Ian Patterson frowned. Then he felt unsteady again. Then he wiggled his

sand wedge, set it down and reached into his golf bag for his putter. When he looked at the bag he could have sworn it moved slightly. Then, as he gingerly pulled out the putter, he had the distinct impression that something hot and wet had grabbed hold of his feet.

\*

‘Jelly baby?’ The Doctor was feeling enormously hungry. He offered round the crumpled white paper sweet bag more out of habit than because he didn’t currently want to eat every one of them at once, followed by a big roast dinner and a full Maori hangi all to himself. His headache had got worse and also felt as if it belonged to someone else, or maybe

something else. Bryony didn't seem to want a jelly baby, but he tried encouraging her. 'Go on. Have a purple one – they taste of Zarnith.' It seemed that sharing a jelly baby might make him feel less lonely.

## **LONELY**

The vast thought swiped in at him and, although it didn't knock him out this time, he did stumble and he was aware that Bryony was staring at him with concern.

'No need to worry,' he told her. 'The world's my lobster. Honestly, I couldn't feel better.' Like all good youngsters on Gallifrey, the Doctor had been brought up with a strong awareness of how little other species knew about, well...

anything and how they usually shouldn't be told about, well... anything, because most of the information a Time Lord might be able to offer them would at least make them retire to the country and keep bees – should their planet have bees, or similar life forms – if not actually drive them irreversibly insane. 'Everything's absolutely fine.'

Just for an instant, the Doctor contemplated what would happen if he were to become irreversibly insane.

And then someone not very far away screamed horribly, which was a great relief, somehow. The Doctor knew exactly what to do when he heard horrible screaming – run towards it and help.



So while David Agnew slipped his safari suit into a locker at the Fetch Hotel Spa and wondered whether he should have a massage first or sit in the hydrotherapy pool, the Doctor was loping across well-groomed turf towards continuing sounds of horror and repeated dull thuds.

Bryony found that she, too, was running as if this was just the right thing to do and, although she was scared silly, she was also completely exhilarated and – despite his hugely long strides – almost keeping up with the Doctor.

‘What are you doing? Grandmother’s this way...’ Xavier called.

But Bryony and the Doctor left the golf cart and the bemused twins behind, coming rapidly to the top of a gentle rise. From there they were able to see the 13th green quite far off with its pretty flag and manicured grass, along with a small flight of crows lifting away out of the trees and croaking in alarm. They could also see a deep bunker with Patterson at the bottom of it. He was flailing about in the pit like someone who had just found out a great deal of new and unpleasant information about life, and he was yelling. He was screaming. In his hand he had what was left of his putter which was – as Bryony stared – both flaring and melting away with a cherry-red glow. The club head

had already gone and the metal shaft was disappearing. As glowing droplets of what Bryony could only think of *redness* fell into the sand, they landed with odd thumps and very clearly made it shudder. Each impact was producing thin trails of gently green vapour.

Like many humans when presented with a reality too strange to digest, she found herself saying something absurd, just to prove she was still there and could hear her own voice. So – as she continued to run forwards – she remarked, breathlessly, ‘Well, that’s unusual for this time of year.’

The Doctor half turned his head back towards her with a huge grin. ‘Splendid. You really are. I knew you would be.’

By the time the Doctor had reached the edge of the bunker, he had already assessed the situation, in as far as he could. There was obviously something under the bunker's surface – something large and carnivorous, perhaps a sandmaster, which shouldn't be anywhere near this solar system, but never mind about that. Or else something worse...

‘Take my hand.’ There had, by now, been arm-waving, screaming and running about and the Doctor was sure that the telling of a wild story was just around the corner... ‘My hand, take it!’ The Doctor reached forward and held out his arm as the chap continued to fire – if you could call it firing – what seemed to be a

very rudimentary fusion lance at the area around his own feet. ‘Take my hand!’ The man shouldn’t have a fusion lance on twentieth-century Earth. No one should.

Patterson did as he was told as the last of what was indeed his fusion lance’s fissile core sputtered and got actually much too hot to hold, although there was no way he was letting go of it while it was still any defence at all. ‘Oh, thank you. Thank you.’ He felt his free hand being grasped in remarkably strong fingers and found himself looking into precisely the type of reliable, experienced face he might have wanted a rescuer to have. ‘Thank you.’

Just then he noticed Bryony arriving

and shouted, 'No, keep back, darling!' And he was suddenly very angry that whoever his rescuer was had put the most wonderful human being on Earth in danger by bringing her along. Although it was lovely to see her. Even though he was mortified that he'd called her 'darling'. And then Patterson felt an altogether different strong grip close back in around his ankles and this time there was a definite tug downwards.

Bryony watched, horrified, as Patterson's feet seemed to sink and jerk unnaturally backward and the rest of him fell forward towards the sand, then jerked to a halt, suspended lopsidedly by the one wrist the Doctor was gripping. Whatever device he'd been holding,

dropped out of his grasp and he windmilled his free arm to try and catch at the Doctor with both hands. It was as if Patterson was drowning and clutching up towards his only hope. The Doctor himself was wrenched over the lip of the bunker when Patterson fell and was left hanging down into the pit, only his legs and waist still on the grass. The glowing, steaming, rippling sand waited below with a kind of dreadful appetite. Both men were clinging to each other desperately by this point, but it seemed certain that Patterson was very likely to drag the Doctor into whatever trouble he was facing, rather than the Doctor being able to haul him out.

So Bryony, without pausing for a

second, raced down to grab the Doctor's ankles.

The Doctor managed, 'Just keep calm. Everything's perfectly all right.'

'No it's not!' chorused Bryony and Patterson.

'No... True...' The Doctor clung on with steely certainty to Patterson's hands while deciding that whatever was under the bunker might not be a sandmaster. It wasn't behaving like a sandmaster... and that metallic taste was very strong, along with a sense of true, primordial horror. 'Very true...' With relief, he felt Bryony working out exactly the most sensible thing to do and taking hold of his feet. She really was a wonderful girl. 'Everything is immensely dangerous, but



I do feel we're managing terribly well under the circumstances.' And if he'd had the spare energy, he would have laughed. This was, after all, why one became a rogue Time Lord, wandering the universe... to be right on the spot when somebody needed rescuing from a glowing green death pit... a pit infested with something he was sure he should be able to remember...

Then the Doctor slipped a few inches nearer the position beyond which he would inevitably topple into the glowing green death pit himself. Which he guessed would be unpleasant. So he decided to stop raising everyone's morale and concentrate on keeping everyone alive by holding very tight and

trusting Bryony.

Bryony wasn't that big or powerful, but she did know that her strongest muscles were in her legs. If she'd sat or lain down and hoped her weight would act as an anchor on the Doctor, she would very probably have been pulled over into the bunker when the Doctor finally slipped forward past his tipping point. Instead, she lifted the Doctor's feet – it was a risk and he did find he was drawn even nearer the bunker as she did so, letting poor Patterson hang ever closer to the shining, oozy, hungry sand. But next she was able to crouch and then slowly stand, leaning back and letting her weight and her legs do the work of pulling. If she both tugged on his ankles

and then fell backwards, still gripping the Doctor, they might be OK. She concentrated all her will and strength into saving both her new friends.

Whatever was holding Patterson fast seemed utterly immoveable, but finally it did give way a bit, then a bit more and then, just when the Doctor gave a long and pained shout, it gave up entirely.

## **SAD**

Another plunging, metallic word battered into the Doctor's mind.

Bryony landed suddenly on her back. The Doctor's legs were tangled in her own and then she was scrambling free as the Doctor was finally able to yank Patterson up and away from danger, Bryony hurrying to reach down and help

with the last hard tug.

For a long space, the three of them lay in a breathless heap, the turf beneath them shaking, and sand – hot, steaming sand – raining down.

But gently, unmistakably, the turf calmed, settled, the sand stopped falling and all was peaceful.

The Doctor was the first to gather his senses, sit up and study his two companions. The girl was... an excellent girl... but the man was – of course – not a man, in the Earth sense... clearly not from round here. Not from anywhere near here... More like someone from Yinzill... In fact, exactly like someone from the planet Yinzill, which the Doctor should have noticed at once... It

wasn't something a massive intellect should *just miss*...

He rubbed his face, found his hat – it had rolled to a safe distance and was calmly waiting for him – and dusted it to give himself something to do. This was all very bad.

## **BAD**

The alien thought was slightly gentler this time and seemed to be leaving, somehow. The Doctor felt as if a large hand was being opened inside his skull and then withdrawn. His headache was back. He also wished that so much of rescuing activity didn't involve arm strain. Beings were always dangling off building, or cliffs, or into evil-minded pools, or bunkers and they always did

need to be hauled back to somewhere less risky. There was a lot of hauling, generally.

**HURT**

**BADHURT**

After which everything was back to normal, expect for this renewed feeling that more bits and pieces had sort of been vanished away from his mind.

He didn't have any time to worry about this, because Bryony – human beings were wonderfully insane – then also sat up, stood up and went to lean over into the bunker and fetch out what was left of the lance. It looked like the blackened stump of a golf club handle. Although it surely wasn't.

As she bent and reached forward into

the sand both the Doctor and Patterson yelled, 'No!'

But it was too late.

Or, at least, it would have been, if rummaging about a bit with her fingers, lifting up the lance and then turning round with a puzzled expression had still been dangerous activities to try. In fact, they were perfectly safe and meant Bryony could stare down into her hand, examine what she'd found and say to Patterson, 'It's very small.'

Patterson was dishevelled and defensive. 'It was quite big when I started.'

Bryony peered at it with distaste, 'Well, it's not big now. But it is ruined. Do you want it back?' She wagged it in

Patterson's direction.

‘Not... well, no, it won't work now. It's...’ Patterson rubbed his sore wrists and stood up, blushing.

‘I'll chuck it back, then.’ And Bryony slung it back into the bunker where it landed with a thump while another ‘No!’ rang out across the golf course. The Doctor and Patterson flinched.

But nothing happened. ‘What?’ Bryony turned to them and frowned at the Doctor. ‘You were pulling him out of the bunker and onto the grass – obviously you think it's safe on the grass... We're all on the grass... I'm on the grass... So we're safe, right?’

‘Well, I wouldn't say—’

‘And how is it you know about these



kinds of things? Doctor? People being dragged underground by a golf bunker kinds of things...?’

She waited while the Doctor wondered why she was sounding cross. He’d saved the day, after all. Again. That was cause for thanks and congratulations and maybe that tea he’d been promised.

Bryony folded her arms as significantly as she could and frowned more, ‘Do you want to explain what on earth is going on?’

The Doctor opened his mouth, but seemed unable to let any words emerge – Bryony was a little bit unnerving when she was angry – and so she turned to Patterson.

‘And who are you, Mr Patterson, and where are you from and what were you firing, or burning, or... what was that, exactly? And don’t tell me it was a big sparkler, or an experimental... umbrella... or that you got struck by lightning, or something else unbelievable, because I’m not a complete idiot.’ Patterson looked so bewildered at this and was so clearly on the verge of crying – Bryony could genuinely be quite fierce – that she softened a little and patted his arm. ‘My dad always used to say that to me – “Bryony, you’re not a complete idiot. I think we lost some of the bits.”’

Usually people found this funny, even if it was a very old joke, but Patterson

just swallowed hard and said, all in a rush, ‘My broodfather hated me. He said I was a waste of perfectly good cloning equipment and I agree, I do, I really agree, but...’

He stared from the bunker to Bryony and then to the Doctor and then took a deep breath, but before he could say anything, the twins appeared over the hill, Xavier driving the golf cart. They both waved tranquilly and shouted, ‘Hello! Hello!’

Honor gambolled delightedly down the slope as if dishevelled strangers and steaming pits were all part of enjoying a normal and lovely summer’s afternoon. ‘We wondered if anyone would like a lift back in the golf cart again.’ She

didn't even glance at the plume of greenish vapour still hanging above the bunker. 'We're sorry there's only one cart, which really isn't big enough to fit five passengers. Grandmother did talk about having more, but she thinks that walking is good for people and should be encouraged and no sitting about unless you're incredibly old – grandmother is incredibly old – or you can sit if you've had to look at somebody who's fainted, or had to be somebody who's fainted. Good afternoon, Mr Patterson.'

Patterson watched his hand being shaken solemnly by the little girl and then Honor led him up the hill as if she was the adult and he was the child.

The Doctor and Bryony followed on, Bryony noticing that she felt sore all over from the recent struggle. As they went, she asked, ‘Doctor, do you get the impression those children are a little unusual?’

The Doctor laughed. It was marvellous that the one thing she chose to mention as unusual was the children. Everything else that had just happened had simply made her inquisitive and cross. *Magnificent*. He took off his hat and waved it at Xavier. ‘I suppose twins are often slightly remarkable...’ Xavier waved back. ‘But yes...’ He racked his brain, trying to recall where he’d read about adorable barefoot pairs of creatures. There was nothing like

reading to prepare you for life, but if all the words were slipping and going dim... if everything you'd read was going to be taken away soon...

He felt a spasm of true panic.

Clearly an alien entity – or Patterson – was flooding this area with telepathic energy at immensely high levels, thousands of psychons, maybe tens of thousands... what could do that? And also lie in wait to devour other beings, just eat them up? Or rather, eat them down? He should know the answer to that. He almost knew that he *did* know, or *had* known a very good answer... And clearly the energy was already animating matter... Sand would be quite easy to form into shapes, limbs, silicon

support structures, jaws... It didn't bear thinking about what might come next, but he definitely felt relieved that he *was* still thinking... even with gaps...

And the Doctor was a determined individual, he didn't give up easily, if at all. As long as he could think, there was hope. He looked up at the perfectly blue 1978 sky – not too radioactive, not too toxic, a gorgeous pearly dab of light when viewed from outer space – and he thumbed through recollections: the perfectly umber skies of Gallifrey, the first time he'd smelt a dew-laden Earth dawn in seventeenth-century France, swimming in the thick silky waters of Praxus Minor – and it seemed that his head was still stuffed with every kind of

this and that. Maybe he'd just misplaced an occasional item, made filing errors due to telepathic shock.

*Nothing to fret about.*

The Doctor glanced down and noticed he was holding Bryony's hand. As if he needed to know someone was there to help him. It was extremely unlikely that a solitary Earth girl with almost no effective technology and not a clue about the space-time continuum, psychodynamics or transchronic psychology would be of any help to him in any way. He didn't let go, though. He held on tighter than ever.

\*

Back at the Fetch Spa, David Agnew



was disgruntled and tense. He hadn't enjoyed his massage. And when he'd shouted at Brian the masseur, two very strong elbows had been pressed very hard up and down his back in a way that probably wasn't strictly necessary.

He'd taken a shower – which wasn't the right temperature, somehow – and now, as a last resort, he was going to sit in the hydrotherapy pool. No matter what, a nice dip in the pool never failed to relax him. He attempted to feel content.

Agnew flip-flopped along the relentlessly calming corridor with its tranquilly scented incense burner, its photographs of placid lakes and its speakers softly playing the songs of

whales who, if he could have understood them, were actually having a quite heated argument with each other. He despised everything about this imposed serenity, but told himself that the idiots and women who were usually in here must find it reassuring. He didn't need this kind of nonsense to help him relax – he just needed to focus on really, properly hating someone and then imagining them being devoured, bit by bit. After he had relaxed, he would run through his plans for the future – the future of everywhere and everything and everyone.

Emerging into the Hydro Room, Agnew came as close as he ever did to happy. He stepped out of his flip-flops

and bath robe, revealing his strangely hairy feet and his checked polyester swimming trunks. Soft lights played on the bubbling surface of the large, warm pool – the room was currently green, the next shade would be blue, then red, then there would be a soft and flattering white light and then the coloured filters would cycle round all over again. A nice soak for a couple of cycles would be more than long enough to cheer him up. There was no one else around – no silly wives gossiping and flapping their hands, no morons boasting about their golf scores – there was only the wonder and the glory that was David Agnew, enjoying the presence of none other than David Agnew. Something told him –

loud and clear – that he was the jewel at the centre of the universe.

\*

In her deluxe cottage Julia Fetch stopped reading a thrilling article about the way an octopus tastes with its arms. She thought this would be inconvenient for humans, because then everything would taste of blouse. Which would be boring – even though her blouses were of a very fine quality and handmade by Markham & Lancet of Jermyn Street. She decided she was slightly peckish and probably that meant it was time for tea... Or had she taken tea already? It was so hard to tell.

Out on the course, Bryony was riding in the golf cart beside Patterson who was, as a result, practically writhing with joy and at the same time more depressed that he had ever been during a quite remarkably depressing life. She nudged him in the ribs, which meant he discovered a new bruise in one of the few places where he hadn't noticed he was sore, but was also enormously delighted. He stared down at his mangled shoes – they were covered in vicious scrapes and something which looked suspiciously like greenish-purplish saliva – and gave himself time to be very, very delighted indeed. This

would probably be the last time she would want to be anywhere near him, but for now – *being delighted*.

She nudged him again. ‘Don’t thank me for saving your life, then.’

‘But I did, I mean I have, I mean... Didn’t I? I thought I thanked you both.’ He gulped down a breath. ‘I am grateful.’ He said this with the tone and facial expression of a person who thought that saving him would always be a terribly bad idea. ‘I just...’ He took the plunge. ‘I’m not called Ian Patterson. I’m called Putta Pattershaun 5, because I’m the fifth Putta Pattershaun – we were a batch of ten – and I’m... all the others have *done* things, and *invented* things and... I was going to head off into the

universe and *achieve*... Only then I met you and... I got distracted... not that meeting you hasn't been an achievement, it's been the best...' He made a noise like a ferret being held underwater and not liking it. 'No, that's not as important as me being from another planet. You should know that. I am. From another planet.' He waited for her to scream. Or hit him. Or call out whatever Earth force dealt with alien threats, possibly by dissecting them and freeze-drying their bits for snacking later.

'Yeah.' She shrugged. 'What I thought. OK.'

'OK!?'

'Yeah.' Bryony had worked this all out already – this or something very like

this – because she *wasn't* a complete idiot. She *was* completely certain it was the coolest thing she'd ever heard of. Nevertheless, she was trying to look unimpressed and managing well, even though she wanted to leap up and down and yell – *A space man, I've met a space man. I am sitting next to a space man. I fancy a space man. And I think he fancies me. Take that, Mangold. Take that, Cardinal Richelieu.* She shrugged again, nonchalant. 'And...?' She wanted to seem like a sophisticated woman of the galaxy and also needed to appear stern, because she didn't like being lied to, or having things hidden from her by a potential boyfriend.

'And? I don't... that is...' The golf



cart juddered slightly less than Putta, but only slightly.

*Potential boyfriend? Where did that come from?* Bryony tried not to look happy, or surprised, or whatever it was that she was starting to feel – she wasn't quite clear right now, but whatever the feeling was it felt pleasant. 'Yes. And...?' Thinking of Patterson, or Putta or whoever he was as a boyfriend suddenly made Bryony realise she ought to consider him in more detail... He was cute. In a mangled way. And he seemed scared of her, which could be fun. And maybe the solution to having found Earth men so disappointing was to choose someone from well outside the neighbourhood. She realised that Putta

was staring at her with a kind of adoring horror.

Putta waved his hands despairingly, ‘*And...* you’re an Earth person, a human being, and human beings are famous all over the... well, you would call it the Pisces-Cetus Supercluster Complex – famous for being...’ He sighed and then blurted out, ‘You kill everything you don’t understand and then sometimes you eat it. You don’t even like people from other continents on your own planet, you...’ He faltered, while the Doctor chuckled audibly.

The Doctor was strolling easily next to the cart, covering the ground in that particularly light-footed, long-striding, tiptoeing way he had. ‘They also have

very promising features. And there's always evolution. They could improve endlessly. Almost endlessly.' The Doctor's large eyes shone benevolently. 'If the black tip sharks and fruit flies don't get there first.'

But Putta wasn't paying any attention to the Doctor, he was meeting Bryony's eyes and blushing, 'I'm so sorry. I didn't intend to be rude about you.'

'Not just rude about me, rude about my entire species... that's a first.'

'Sorry.' Putta squirmed visibly.

'Then next time maybe mention that we do...' Bryony tried to think of anything human beings were good at. The 1970s hadn't been inspiring so far – starvation in Biafra, nuclear testing,

terrorist attacks and hijackings, Nixon being Nixon... at least the war in Vietnam was over, but things in Cambodia didn't look good... 'We do make a lovely shepherd's pie. For example. Sometimes. Some of us. By which I mean we kill things we don't understand and put them into pies... I don't mean we would make good pies by being put into them as a filling, although I suppose we could... By a superior alien race...' While Putta desperately tried not to look superior and absolutely managed, Bryony grinned, 'We are a bit disappointing... And shepherd's pie isn't even a pie – no pastry.' She nudged him on an especially tender bruise. 'You're from outer space. How great is

that? That's just...' And she thought about kissing him, but then reconsidered and acted cool again.

'While I am glad that we're all friends...' The Doctor leaned in under the golf cart's gaily striped canopy as they progressed across the turf and fixed Putta with an icy look. 'Apart from the multiple treaties and byelaws you're transgressing... Explain yourself, young Putta. What are you doing here so far from Yinzill? It is Yinzill, isn't it? Your home world? Yinzill in the Ochre Period.'

Bryony interrupted. 'Never mind that – what happened to him?'

'Which is also a good question,' the Doctor admitted.

Bryony continued, ‘And what happened to the bunker? I’m not a big fan of golf, but I do know bunkers aren’t supposed to reach up and grab people’s feet. Or Yinzillites’ feet.’

Putta was, of course, aware that the proper word for a being from Yinzill was a *Yakt*, but thought it was sweet of her to make the effort and didn’t like to correct her in case she punched him. She seemed to be a very physical kind of Earth person and was quite possibly stronger than he was.

‘Well?’ And she was glowering at him in expectation of an answer.

Putta tried to organise his information in a logical stream, ‘Well, I... that is... My family... several of the other Puttas

have done very well as... I mean...' He sort of knew this wasn't going to go well. 'I am a bountykiller.'

'*Wha-at!?*' The Doctor made the word sound much longer and more threatening than usual and suddenly looked completely furious. 'Barging round the universe, collecting trophies for ultra-millionaires? Making the shells of barber sylphs into finger bowls...!?'

'But I never—'

'You criticise human beings and you're throwing stun canisters into bandan nests!? *Of all the idiotic...!?*'

'I haven't... I like bandans... And sylphs... We only target predator species.'

The Doctor's whole frame was

bristling with outrage and suddenly he didn't look at all like an amiable fool, more like a formidable enemy of injustice and wasteful harm. 'And who decides which species is a predator? You? You think you have the right?'

'There's a list...' Putta scrabbled in his inside pocket, then in each of his pockets... with increasing levels of despair... 'They give us a list.' He couldn't find the list. It was gone, along with his fusion lance. (His lance not-very-cunningly disguised as a golf club, given that he couldn't play golf – he'd somehow put his name in the Form section of the formatting instructions and ended up with a putter...) And he no longer had his Model G50 Threat



Detector, which started leaking psy fluid after he dropped it on a hard surface – which you weren't supposed to – so he'd had to throw it away before it dissolved his control panel, and his hands for that matter, it was appalling stuff, psy fluid...

The Doctor raged on. 'Is *she* a predator?' He pointed at Bryony who couldn't help being slightly alarmed. She'd never seen him like this. 'Is everyone who eats shepherd's pie a predator? Shouldn't they be?'

'I don't... I'm not sure... That is, I've never...'

'So many lives, so delicately balanced, so close to the abyss, so full of hope, and some greedy squad of

imbeciles classifies them as a predator, as a resource, and you and your kind of destructive idiots come along and harvest them until they're gone.' The Doctor looked both furious and implacably sad.

He seemed so alone in his grief that Bryony touched his arm. 'I don't think he meant any harm.'

'His kind never mean any harm – they still do it!' The Doctor stopped himself, quietened. 'Very few species truly understand that actions have consequences. When you destroy something, that isn't an isolated act.' And for a second or so he looked like someone who had understood far too many consequences and who had been

made very tired by that. Then he patted Bryony's shoulder. 'Our lives are connected. And other lives are connected to those lives and on and on. We are even connected... to Putta Pattershaun 5.' He glowered at Putta.

Putta responded with an apologetic babble. 'I thought it would be a good idea, I mean I don't like it, haven't liked it, haven't done it, not properly... I've never killed anything. I took aim at a Parthian mind wasp and I couldn't fire. And they're terrible. They can eat your whole personality and then lay their eggs in your face. But they have wonderful wings. There were colours in the wings that I'd never seen on any planet... I just couldn't...'

Bryony kept on with what she thought was a promising line of enquiry which would be much more use than additional shouting. ‘Patter-Putter, whatever your name is. Never mind all that – what happened to you? Did you do something? Did you bring some alien thing with you that ended up in the bunker? A whatsit, sense wasp? Something else? Or do your people have a problem with sand? Does it usually eat you?’

‘Which is what I would have asked. Roughly. What I would have asked if you hadn’t kept interrupting,’ nodded the Doctor. ‘Except for the sand part.’

‘Sand? No, we like sand,’ Putta bleated miserably. ‘Unless it gets into our shoes, or... elsewhere... Oh... I

don't know. I thought... My detector, just before it broke it showed this, this signal that couldn't even have been true, but I landed here to look for – no one has even heard of them, not for millennia, and I didn't expect to find... but then maybe the detector was broken already, giving a false reading before I dropped it... and I was left, anyway, with no more detector, no more signal, no more...' Bryony was glowering at him with such impatience that he gulped and steered himself round to the events of the afternoon. 'There was this man, this human man and I met him in the bar.' Bryony snorted with derision which would have made her seem slightly unattractive to anyone but Putta. He

continued, ‘The man definitely... he *lured* me into that sandpit. I’d never even seen him before.’

‘Did you do something to him?’ Bryony asked, with a hurtful level of suspicion.

‘You are quite annoying you know,’ confided the Doctor. ‘That could rub people up the wrong way. Not to mention your profession. Did you mention your profession – Bountykiller Putta?’ He pronounced the last two words as if they were a disease.

‘I didn’t mention anything,’ whined Putta. ‘I was being as human as possible and that appears to involve golf and sandpits.’

‘Bunkers,’ corrected Bryony and then

disliked herself for it.

‘Bunkers. He was very angry all the time. I mean, so angry I could feel it on my skin somehow...’ Putta wrung his hands.

‘Can you usually feel other people’s mental states?’ the Doctor asked sharply. ‘And did you have a strange taste in your mouth?’

Putta nodded and looked calmer, as if he now had the resident expert on his side. ‘Yes, a funny taste and, no, I can’t usually feel... well, my own feelings are a bit of a problem without anyone else’s...’ He caught sight of Bryony’s frown and got back to the main issue. ‘The man... Mr Agnew... I think he knew about the bunker and he got angrier

and angrier as he walked me over here and then he made me play golf and got angrier still – only in a nasty, happy kind of way – and then the bunker got angry and then he left as soon as... once it started trying to eat me... he ran away.’ He looked a bit sickly as he remembered. ‘It grabbed my feet. If I hadn’t already got out my fusion lance...’ And then he didn’t want to finish the sentence.

The Doctor tsked. ‘Running around showing off advanced technology to a less developed and very... emotional species...’ As if he’d never do such a thing himself. ‘You ought to be ashamed.’

‘Thank you for saving me.’



‘Well, it’s all part of a day’s work, really, I—’ The Doctor broke off when he saw Putta smiling carefully at Bryony and nodding.

Bryony wasn’t currently that interested in gratitude. She thought she was on to something. ‘If he laid the trap... If Mr Agnew laid the trap, he must know how it operates and what it is. It must be his trap.’

‘Yes, you know, if you think about it, whoever laid the trap would understand what it is and be the one to use it,’ the Doctor added. In case anyone had forgotten he was a genius. He was already hypothesising about how a telepathic bond would react if it were partially corporeal and suffered pain,

because – for example – someone had repeatedly fired a fusion lance at it... if the mild psychic abilities of a sandmaster had been somehow magnified and tamed... and if its governing consciousness had run away and abandoned it while it was injured... A feedback loop in that kind of situation could be extremely bad news for everyone concerned.

Bryony burst in with, ‘Then we have to find Agnew!’ and looked pleased with herself. ‘I mean, shouldn’t we?’

The Doctor nodded absently, murmuring to himself. ‘My tracking skills are a bit rusty. I studied with the Miccosukee people for a while...’ He began to stare significantly at the grass.

‘It will take great skill...’

‘Or we could look in the spa,’  
suggested Putta.

‘Don’t be ridiculous.’

‘He mentioned he was going back to the spa.’ Putta blinked. There was a pause.

The Doctor boomed, ‘Why on earth didn’t you say so?’

‘But you didn’t ask.’

‘Turn that thing round at once and back to the hotel!’

As Putta and Bryony swung the golf cart unsteadily round to follow the Doctor, the twins trotted swiftly into their path and stood.

Xavier told them, firmly, ‘I don’t think you should. Grandmother is expecting

you.'

'Yes. And you shouldn't disappoint Grandmother.' Honor looked sad, but also very determined. 'She likes tea. A lot.'

The Doctor adopted his most persuasive voice, 'Oh, but we can come back. Yes, we can. Immediately. We have this one thing we must do together by ourselves in the Spa and then we'll be back and then absolutely tea with Grandmother will happen. I look forward to it, I do.' He wondered how a powerful effusion of psychons might affect the malleable minds of children. Probably quite badly.

The twins stared at him and suddenly didn't seem even slightly adorable.

Their limbs stiffened and their faces hardened. It was possible to think that they might be dangerous in a fight – very swift and unforgiving.

Bryony found herself thinking they should just abandon the golf cart and run – it would be faster, even with Putta's badly bruised ankles. She also suddenly felt certain the twins would turn out to be much faster than anyone else running and that their speed might not be a comforting or unthreatening thing.

‘It isn't four o'clock yet, you know. And four o'clock is tea time,’ the Doctor wheedled. He very carefully pretended to be someone who didn't feel scared in any way. ‘We all promise we'll be back here by four. If you wait for us. And then

we'll have fun, which I always enjoy, there's nothing as much fun as fun, I find. Don't you find?' He wagged his hands and shrugged like someone who wasn't rapidly calculating and puzzling and trying to get back to the hotel *fast* and to work out the twins' real nature, while soothing them with unstoppable courtesy. Soothing with unstoppable courtesy often worked on most planets. It was one of the many reasons why the Doctor didn't carry a gun.

And then, as if the sun had come out – or as if they had finished their own calculations – the twins giggled and stood aside and Honor said, 'Yes, we'll see you later then. That will be terribly nice. And fun.'

And Xavier patted Bryony on her arm and said, ‘Good luck, old girl.’

This felt just a little bit creepy, so Bryony put her foot down and the cart zoomed – in as far as it could zoom – back towards the spa with the Doctor loping alongside as though what he loved most in whole the universe was rushing towards dangerous situations without having a proper plan. Or any plan at all.

\*

The three arrived at the Fetch Hotel to see that the foyer was full of dissatisfied guests. Mr Mangold was just saying, ‘I am doing my best, sir. Miss Mailer, my receptionist, has disappeared...’ So he

didn't call her Junior when she wasn't around, Bryony noted as she hurried past, shouting, 'Guest emergency! Can't stop!'

By the time they'd reached the Spa Section, they had all realised that they certainly did look in need of relaxation and therapy. At the very least. Putta was covered in sand, grass, mud, vapour stains, fissile backwash and a layer of anxiety. In places his suit looked as if something had recently tried to eat it, because something had. Bryony's own business suit had several small rips in it, was grass-stained, her tights were ruined and her name badge was missing, along with her shoes, she now noticed – she'd taken them off when she had helped



wrestle Putta out of the pit. Or bunker. And her hair was alarming. The Doctor – he looked like the Doctor, which was always vaguely alarming to people like the Spa Manageress (who habitually patronised Bryony, because of her poor skincare, obvious split ends and Junior status).

‘Can I help you?’ There was a blatant sneer in the question.

The Doctor paced up to the Spa Welcome Desk like a jolly tiger in a maroon jacket. ‘Indeed you can. How splendid that you’re here. Just who we need.’ He fished a weirdly pristine piece of paper out of his pocket and unfolded it for the Manageress to inspect. Whatever she read on it made

her immediately attentive and slightly flirtatious. She gladly showed the Doctor that day's register and David Agnew's signature – he'd definitely signed in and hadn't signed out yet. He must be inside.

The Manageress then insisted on giving each of them gift bags and free swimming costumes. It took all Bryony's powers of persuasion to get them into the spa without having to accept a guided tour, free sauna and beating with twigs.

\*

Far across the Fetch Estate, the golf cart had been parked neatly in its charging bay behind Julia Fetch's cottage. The twins were standing near it. Slowly,

Honor pressed the palms of her hands against Xavier's and he pressed back.

Honor asked Xavier, 'Shall we go and speak to Grandmother?'

And Xavier told Honor, 'No. Let's not. Not yet. Let's do this instead.'

So they stood and pressed their hands together while the birds sang and little breezes pushed about amongst the rose bushes in Julia Fetch's garden.



The Doctor and his companions rendezvoused in the Tranquillity Lounge, which instantly became less tranquil. In fact, its two occupants – sisters Sylvia and Rosemary Hindle from High

Wycombe – decided they might just head off somewhere else. Right away.

As several firmly worded signs said they must when in the Therapy Areas, Putta and Bryony wore their new, slightly ill-fitting, swimming costumes, Fetch Spa issue flip-flops and bathrobes. Putta was absolutely certain that he was never taking his bathrobe off, not even if it killed him. Bryony was never going to see him in swimming trunks. It was bad enough that his gingery-haired shins and monster-bitten ankles were so horribly visible.

The Doctor had managed to pass through the changing rooms without changing a bit – apart from having folded his hat into his jacket pocket and

having donned a gift-bag shower cap instead. His hair was fighting the shower cap. And winning.

‘Now stay with me.’ It was very hard to take him seriously in the cap. ‘I mean it. No good will come from our splitting up and I can’t be everywhere and...’ His sentence trailed off and he seemed to become unfocused for a few breaths. But then he stalked off with immense energy and they began their hunt for Agnew.

The woody heat of the sauna, the foggy depths of the Turkish baths, the bad-tempered massage rooms, even the towel cupboard were searched before they all – staying together, just as the Doctor had said they must – walked along the corridor to the Hydro Room.

As he pressed on, the Doctor felt that metallic taste in his mouth again and began to think that having a plan at this point might have been a good idea.

There was something dreadfully uninviting about the warm, thick, damp air slowly oozing from the pool. And wouldn't it maybe have been safer to split up, to let his companions wander off and not run the same risks as he was about to?

The Hydro Room lighting was on the red part of its cycle and the wide, round pool was bubbling and seething dramatically. Agnew was lolling back in it as if he was having the time of his life – eyes closed and a slight smile on his lips.

The Doctor understood at once that many things were terrifyingly wrong and he regretted absolutely having brought the others with him. He said, very quietly, ‘Perhaps you two should go outside.’ His head throbbed and his ears seemed filled with the roiling of the pool waters. His tongue and lips were coppery.

Putta stared at the red, restless liquid and at Agnew. And he was annoyed. Really as annoyed as he’d ever allowed himself to be. ‘It’s no use pretending to be asleep!’ he shouted. ‘You left me out there. With that thing! Now, what is it? Tell us what it is! Tell us what you are!’

The Doctor said, even more quietly, ‘He can’t tell us.’

‘Of course he can!’ Putta was enjoying being angry. Other people had always been angry with him and this time it was going to be his turn. ‘You! Wake up!’ He leaned right over the edge of the pool and shouted with all his might across the water to Agnew: ‘Wake up!’

Which was when the colour of the lights changed to soft and flattering white and yet the water and Agnew’s face were still thickly red and patches of damp on the floor were red and Bryony felt sick and then she *was* sick and the Doctor seemed to be walking over to comfort her, but then he cried out, holding his head and dropped to the red-spattered tiles, kneeling and rocking,



apparently in torment.

As Bryony rushed to him she heard Putta call, ‘Bryony! Bryony! Get out! Leave us! Bryony! Run!’

And when she looked up she saw the thin, funny, little man called Putta trying to rush away from the pool, but what looked like ropes, like purple-red muscular ropes, were undulating and rushing out of the water and they caught at the hem of his red-stained bathrobe, snaked into its loose sleeves and wrapped around him, dragging him slithering and fighting back towards the water.

Bryony met his eyes and thought that he was a very brave man, or being, or whatever, and a good one and that it was

a shame he'd never realise it. She thought he would have liked himself more if he had.

The Doctor yelled to her, 'It's a feedback loop – the pain drove it back here. Get out now! With no mind to control the creature, it will devour everything it can find! I should have known! Quickly! It doesn't know what else to do!'

And then a huge thought swept through him again.

## **BLOOD**

He'd led them all into the same trap that had just turned on Agnew, its creator.

'Run!'

Bryony wavered, as the Doctor

convulsed and Putta battled the swift, repulsive arms swarming around him. Clearly it would be sensible to run... She paused for a breath.

‘Go!’ Putta was fighting desperately to get out of the bathrobe that might very well kill him, as the pulsing tentacles slithered over his body, scraping his skin like gluey sand as they went.

‘Please!’

But Bryony couldn’t run.

‘It was feeding on his rage!’ The Doctor, was holding his head in both hands. ‘I can feel it... this... fury... magnifying. It’s so angry... so... scared...’

## **BLOOD**

‘Then don’t be furious! And don’t be

scared!’ Bryony was yelling herself now. ‘Relax!’ Putta looked at her in utter bewilderment. ‘Relax, Putta. Trust me. You can trust me, can’t you, you stupid space man!’

And she said this with such affection that Putta did relax. The arms immediately drew him right against the low wall that contained the pool, knocking the breath out of him, but then they too relaxed slightly. They seemed indecisive. The ends of a few tentacles twitched, shivered.

‘Pat them!’

‘What?’ Putta looked at her as if she was insane.

But the Doctor, still pale and wincing, nodded. ‘Yes. Of course! Of course! The

field is still operational. It will magnify whatever we feel.’ He focused on thinking clearly, gently, willed the agony in his skull to retreat a little. ‘If we can’t dissipate it, we can change its orientation and bring it back under control. Well done, Bryony. Well done.’ He trembled, frowned, but also managed to nod encouragingly. ‘You’re terribly good at this.’

‘Then let’s blooming well get on with it!’ Bryony yelled again.

Putta just stared, locked with fear. He was in danger of quite literally terrifying himself to death. The Doctor knew that if Putta made the creature too frightened it would defend itself – by killing Putta.

The Doctor tried to help, ‘Imagine it’s

a big... like a giant...’

**BBBBB...**

He tried to imagine something huge but loveable with lots of arms, and couldn’t bring anything to mind apart from an immense and fluffy tarantula – which very few beings would find that adorable – so he just suggested. ‘Tickle it. Go on, Putta. Tickle it.’

**Bbbb...**

Putta reached out gingerly – in as far as he could while the tentacles were tight round him – and patted and then did tickle the muscular bond fastening his other arm to his side. He was wrapped in an immense, clammy strength, but it was no longer contracting. It no longer felt quite as horrifying. He tickled some

more. He patted the flesh he'd been trying to keep away from his throat.

‘That’s it.’ Bryony nodded. ‘It’s working. At least, it’s stopped.’

‘Of course it’s working!’ The Doctor was still clearly in pain, but looked less grey. ‘And we have to... we have to think calmly, we have to be friendly towards it. We have to love it. I think. If we...’ He broke off for a few seconds as his headache peaked. ‘We need to love it. We need to be very, very fond of it indeed.’

‘Are you out of your mind!?’

‘Just do it, Putta!’ both Bryony and the Doctor bellowed. So he tried.

**Aaabbb...**

Bryony concentrated on attempting to

find anything endearing about the heaving red and purple mass which had almost overwhelmed Putta. As she did so, the creature seemed to shudder and lose definition. Putta started to be able to gasp in complete breaths – much to his relief – and could move a little more.

As soon as he did move, the beast tightened around him again, but he tried not to panic, tried to let his limbs flop, relax, relax, relax, and to encourage the grating, sliding pressure to release again. It made his skin crawl. Which was because it was crawling over his skin. But that was fine. If it would just let him go that would be fine. Even if it simply didn't eat him, but kept a hold of him for the rest of his life and he just had



to get used to wearing some kind of immense purplish slime and grit monster that would be fine... it would all be fine... he could be calm...

The Doctor filled his consciousness with the faces of all the companions he had enjoyed knowing – their faces and the times when they had helped him, the times when they had been amazed by the universe along with him. He thought about the universe: the light-producing microbes that danced on the walls of the Delling Caves, the Great Library, the Song Towers of Und, the unlikeliness of life existing anywhere in the first place and yet the way it blossomed and flourished and celebrated itself and was so beautiful.

**A**

**A**

**a**

**a**

**b**

**c**

**d**

And finally Putta found himself dumped onto the floor as the creature trapping him simply collapsed into sand, warm sand, warm wet clinging sand and a kind of rush of dissipating motion.

He looked up at the two beings he would most want to nearly be killed with – if he had to be nearly killed – as they came cautiously towards him. His bathrobe was several feet away, partly obscured by a sand drift – which meant

that Bryony had seen him in his trunks. And being nearly crushed to death. And covered in slime. And sand. Which was also inside his swimming trunks. Oh, but things could be so much worse. They really could.

The Doctor set out his arm to keep Bryony back and advanced slowly, but with an increasingly enormous smile. ‘Not so tricky, really once the problem was fully understood.’ He kicked gently at the sand heaped around Putta. ‘I had my suspicions, naturally.’

Bryony, punched his arm. ‘Your suspicions...’

‘Naturally.’ He winked. ‘And we would undoubtedly all be dead without you. It was incredibly prescient of me to

have chosen you. A sign of true genius.'

'I beg your pardon.' Bryony couldn't help smiling, too. '*You chose me?*'

'I just said that. Do keep up.' The Doctor grinned.

\*

Back at Julia Fetch's cottage the twins were still leaning against each other, palm to palm with arms outstretched.

Slowly their hands melted and melded and reformed, looking for a while like a reddish pink ball of dense fluid, caught spinning and writhing at the ends of their arms. Their enchanting faces blurred and their eyes blinked unnaturally open.

There seemed to be a vibration in the air around them and, had anyone been

looking at them, it would have been difficult to see them clearly. Even the grass around their feet became almost liquid. Reality itself seemed willing to melt and pour away

But then – slowly, delicately, the grass blades solidified, the air stopped shimmering and the twins' faces became suddenly very clear, peaceful, loveable and their hands became only the usual kind of hands, with the usual kind of fingers. Everything, everywhere seemed to be held in suspension – as if the universe was a sleeping cat, just about to stretch, but not yet – and if Julia had looked out of her window, she would have noticed that the area around the cottage seemed impossibly bright and

perfectly formed.

And then Honor and Xavier – slightly as if they had been dreaming for a while – shook their heads and laughed and the universe stretched and settled back into place and they shouted together, ‘Tea! Tea! It must be time for tea!’ and scampered towards the cottage door.

\*

The Doctor had thought it best to lead his two companions out of the spa through the fire exit. None of them remotely resembled individuals who had been through a sublimely tranquil and restorative experience of balanced wholeness. They looked if they been buried at sea. And that might have

alarmed the Spa Manageress. Who would eventually discover the scene of horror they were leaving behind. The Doctor found that leaving behind scenes of horror was usually wise, particularly if you might be likely to get the blame for them.

Their unconventional route out – which hadn't passed the changing rooms – meant that Putta now had to cope with being outdoors in a sand- and slime-covered bathrobe (without flip-flops) in the presence of Bryony. Who had saved his life. Again. He was unsure about whether he wanted to burst into song, or make a break for his Type F378a Abrischooner, fire up the engines and never be seen again. At least he had

discovered that it wasn't actually possible to die of shame. Which, in a day of hideous shocks, had still come as something of a surprise.

Bryony herself was sporting a marginally less grubby bathrobe. She was, Putta thought, looking quite graceful as they set off back towards the golf course. Trotting barefoot next to the Doctor, she peppered him with questions. Putta had never seen anyone trot barefoot more beautifully. Actually, he'd never seen anyone trot barefoot — but that didn't make her any less monumentally lovely.

Lovely and frustrated. 'But I don't understand—'

'Naturally, you don't,' the Doctor



interrupted. ‘You have no experience of what would happen if a completely reckless interplanetary vandal managed to both spill psy fluid on a planet where it didn’t belong and accidentally introduce a sandmaster larva to the perfect environment to hyper-accelerate its developmental cycle. *Beings who shall remain nameless should remember to decontaminate their hulls before they make planetfall... You...*’ He growled at Putta as if he was only letting him remain nameless because he couldn’t bear to pronounce his name and shot him a glance that made him huddle deeper into his oversized, but tattered robe. ‘You, *Putta*, came much closer to wiping out every life form on Earth than

anyone should on their first visit. Or on any visit. Do you intend to destroy *every* civilisation you encounter?’ He continued to glare and then seemed to find further scolding impossible and lapsed back into explaining how cleverly he had worked things out, despite being subjected to a massive psychon dose.

‘I had the largest available consciousness, you see... So it attacked me the most.’

‘But where has it gone? Where’s the monster?’ Bryony still wasn’t satisfied and she didn’t think this was because she hadn’t got enough experience of sandthings. She thought it was most likely because the Doctor was extremely

bad at explaining and possibly because he was improvising and still unsure of what had really happened himself.

‘Doctor, one minute, it’s eating everyone it can get a hold of and the next it’s a heap of muck. Which there will be complaints about. And... oh, lord...’

Bryony remembered the body in the pool – Agnew’s ghastly, bloodless face above the bubbling, crimson water... She felt chilled and bewildered, and the Doctor put his arm around her to keep her steady.

He gently distracted her with information. ‘The sandmaster’s life cycle was advancing so rapidly that, while it was highly aggressive, it probably only had a few hours left

before it would either join a mating stream – which it couldn't because we'd surely know if there was more than one around here – or... well, they tend to either explode or dissolve. We seemed to speed up its decomposition—'

'Explode? You didn't tell us it might explode!'

'Would you have been happier if I had?'

'No, but—'

'Then I made a terribly wise decision by not mentioning it. And they don't *often* explode. Then again, they don't often come into contact with psy fluid and have their psychic abilities massively magnified so that they can control matter, interfere with minds...'

The Doctor made a noise somewhere between a snarl and a sigh. ‘Those twins seemed quite perceptive, didn’t they. And not a little odd. I suspect they were affected by the psychic field, though I doubt for a moment that they noticed.’

Putta winced, expecting to be shouted again. But instead he felt the strong and heavy thump of the Doctor’s free arm hugging his bruised shoulders. ‘Putta. Let’s go and have tea. Don’t you think that would be a good idea? Tea, anyone?’

‘Oh, well...’ Putta gulped and felt mildly tearful. ‘Um, tea. I think I’ve had that before. It was nice. It didn’t try to kill me.’

And Bryony found herself making the

decision unanimous. ‘Tea.’ Because tea might be what you should have after vanquishing an alien, emotionally sensitive carnivorous golf bunker monster. As far as she could tell.

‘Yes. The cottage is this way, isn’t it?’ The Doctor released them both and paced languidly ahead across the grass, accompanied by his scarf and his new excellent friends.

But then he stopped, turned.

‘By the way, Bryony. Thank you so much for saving my life.’ And he looked at her, his eyes quickly serious, frighteningly intelligent, a quality in them that seemed to *know* her right down to her bare feet. ‘I would have been completely done for without you.’

Then he rubbed his face and looked more playful, seemed to be waiting for a compliment. Bryony duly delivered one. ‘Well, but you were the expert.’

‘Yes, I was, wasn’t I?’ The Doctor nodded without a trace of modesty. ‘I almost always am.’ And he unleashed a startlingly huge smile.

‘As long as the thing’s gone...’

‘Oh, I’m sure it is. Either that or I’m completely wrong and we’re all still in horrible and increasing danger.’ He chuckled and dodged from foot to foot. ‘Only time will tell.’

And then the Doctor turned back and headed off again, calling over his shoulder. ‘You didn’t do so badly either, Putta. There may be hope for you yet.’

His long form loping over the grass as if he liked nothing better than walking across strange planets full of promising people with tea and perhaps cake at the end of his journey. Tea and cake or horrible and increasing danger. Either one would do.



This ebook is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorized distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author's and publisher's rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

Version 1.0

Epub ISBN 9781448141845

[www.randomhouse.co.uk](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk)

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Published in 2013 by BBC Books, an imprint  
of Ebury Publishing.

A Random House Group Company

Copyright © A.L. Kennedy 2013

A.L. Kennedy has asserted her moral right to be identified as the author of the Work in accordance with Sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

*Doctor Who* is a BBC Wales production for BBC One.

Executive producers: Steven Moffat and Brian Minchin

BBC and DOCTOR WHO (word marks, logos and devices) are trademarks of the British Broadcasting Corporation and are used under licence.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any

means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No.  
954009

Addresses for companies within the Random  
House Group can be found at  
[www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm)

BBC

# DOCTOR WHO

TIME

TRIPS

A.L.

# Kennedy

The Death Pit

